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ADDRESS
OF
PRESIDENT WILSON

AT THE
FIRST ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE
MOTION PICTURE BOARD OF TRADE



NEW YORK CITY
(THE BILTMORE)
JANUARY 27, 1916



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ADDRESS.

MR. TOASTMASTER AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I wondered when I was on my way here what would be expected of me. It occurred to me that perhaps I would only be expected to go through the motions of a speech, and then I reflected that, never having seen myself speak and generally having my thoughts concentrated upon what I had to say, I had not the least notion what my motions were when I made a speech. Because it has never occurred to me in my simplicity to make a speech before a mirror. If you will give me time, I will rehearse this difficult part and return and perform it for you.

I have sometimes been very much chagrined in seeing myself in a motion picture. I have wondered if I really was that kind of a "guy." The extraordinary rapidity with which I walked, for example, the instantaneous and apparently automatic nature of my motion, the way in which I produce uncommon grimaces, and altogether the extraordinary exhibition I make of myself sends me to bed very unhappy. And I often think to myself that, although all the world is a stage and men and women but actors upon it, after all the external appearances of things are very superficial indeed. I am very much more interested in what my fellow-men are thinking about than in the motions through which they are going. While we unconsciously display a great deal of human nature in our visible actions, there are some very deep waters which no picture can sound.

When you think of a great nation, ladies and gentlemen, you are not thinking of a visible thing; you are thinking of a spiritual thing. I suppose a man in public office feels this with a peculiar poignancy, because what it is important for him to know is the real, genuine sentiments and emotions of the people that make up the nation. I found out what was going on in Mexico in a very singular way,—by hearing a sufficiently large number of liars talk about it. I think the psychological explanation will interest you.

You know that the truth is consistent with itself; one piece matches another. Now no man is an inventive enough liar not to bring in large sections of truth in what he says, and after all the liars are done talking to you about the same subject it will come to your consciousness that long and large pieces of what they said matched; that in that respect they all said the same thing; that the variations are lies and the consistencies are the truth. They will not all tell you the same piece of the truth, so that if you hear enough of them,

you may get the whole of the truth. And yet it is very tedious to hear men lie, particularly when you know they are lying. You feel like reminding them that really your time is important to you and that you wish they would get down to business and tell you what is really so, but they do not. They want this adventure of their invention: they want to give an excursion to their minds before they get down to business. What I particularly object to is a very able man with a lot of inventions coming to me and lying to me, because then the interview is very tedious and long before we get down to business. I got to know that story so by heart that the last time a deputation visited me about Mexico I thought I would save time and I told them exactly what they were going to say to me. They went away very much confused; they wondered how I had heard it, because they knew it was not so.

Yet underneath all of this are those great pulses which throb in great bodies of men and drive the great affairs of state, and I wonder how men venture to try to deceive a great nation. There never was a profounder saying than that of Lincoln that you can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time, and the best way in which to silence any friend of yours whom you know to be a fool is to induce him to hire a hall. Nothing chills pretense like exposure. Nothing will bear the tests of examination for a shorter length of time than pretense. At least so I try to persuade myself, and yet there are some humbugs that have been at large a long time. I suppose that there is always a rising generation whom they can fool, but the older heads ought not to permit themselves to be fooled.

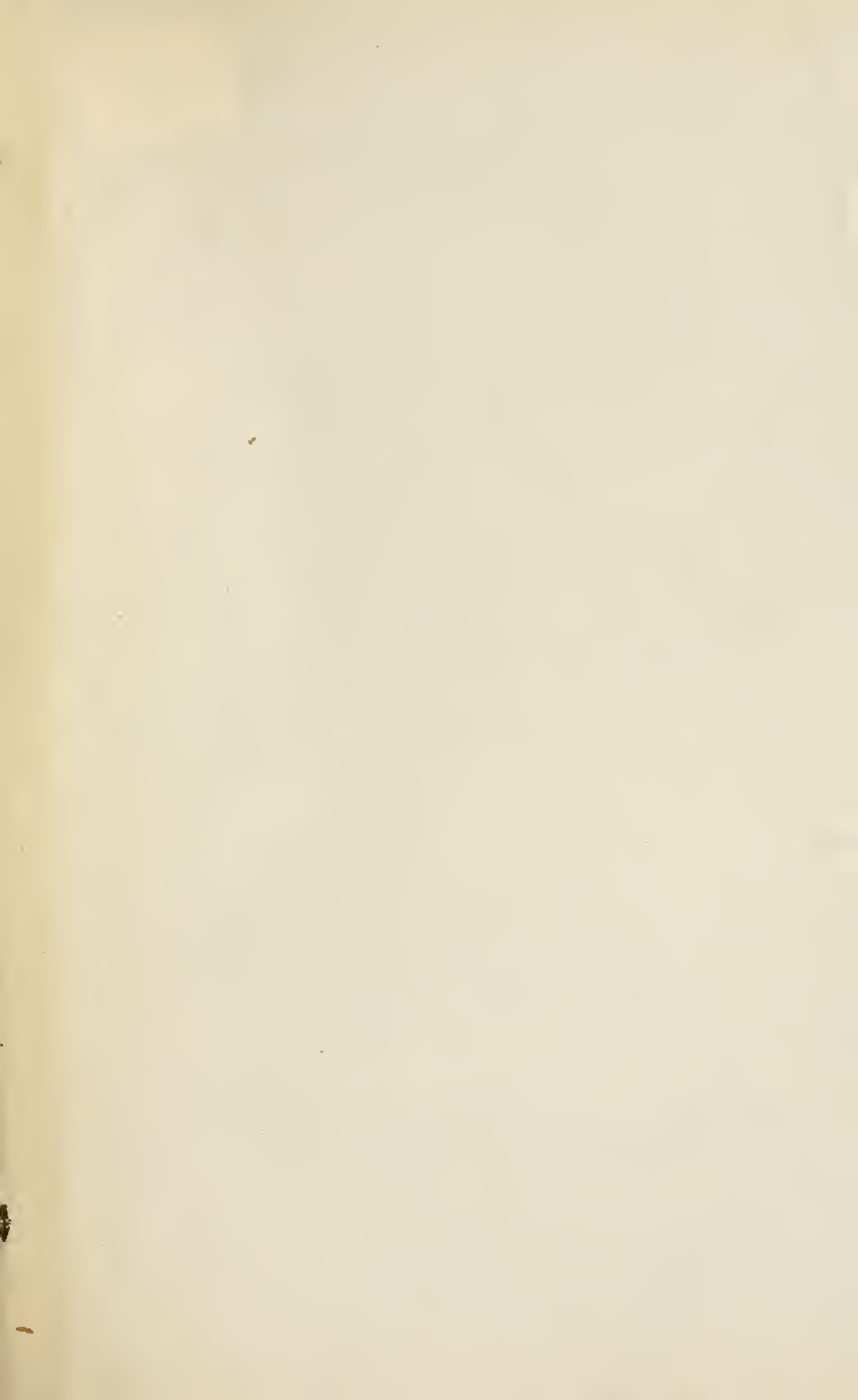
I should think that in a year like the year 1916, when there is to be a common reckoning for everybody, men would hurry up and begin to tell the truth. They are not hurrying about it; they are taking their time, but the American people are going to insist upon it before this year is over that everybody comes up and is counted on the great questions of the day. They are not going to take any excuses, they are not going to take any pretenses; they are going to insist upon the goods being delivered on the spot, and anybody that declines to deliver them is going to go bankrupt, and ought to go bankrupt. Everybody ought to get what is coming to him.

But I came here to say that I hoped you would not believe that I am what I appear to be in the pictures you make of me. I really am a pretty decent fellow! And I have a lot of emotions that do not show on the surface, and the things that I do not say would fill a library. The great curse of public life is that you are not allowed to say all the things that you think. Some of my opinions about some men are extremely picturesque, and if you could only take a motion picture of them, you would think it was Vesuvius in eruption.

Yet all these volcanic forces, all these things that are going on inside of me, have to be concealed under a most grave and reverend exterior, and I have to make believe that I have nothing but respectable and solemn thoughts all the time. There is a lot going on inside of me that would be entertaining to any audience anywhere.

I am very much complimented that you should have allowed me to come in at this late hour in your feast and, without partaking of the pleasures of conversation, to make you all, whether you would or not, listen to me talk. My object in life is not talking. I wish there were less talking to do. I wish that not everybody had to be persuaded to do the right thing. I wish that the things that are obvious did not have to be explained. I wish that principles did not have to be re-expounded. We all in our hearts agree upon the fundamental principles of our lives and of our life as a nation: now we ought to tax ourselves with the duty of seeing that those principles are realized in action and no fooling about it. The only difficult things in life, ladies and gentlemen, are the applications of the principles of right and wrong. I can set forth the abstract principles of right and wrong, and so can you, but when it comes down to an individual item of conduct, whether in public affairs or in private affairs, there comes the pinch,—in the first place, to see the right way to do it; and, in the second place, to do it that way. If we could only agree that in all matters of public concern we would adjourn our private interests, look each other frankly in the face and say, "We are all ready at whatever sacrifice of our own interest to do in common the thing that the common weal demands," what an irresistible force America would be! I can point out to you a few men,—of course, I am not going to name them now,—whom every man ought to be afraid of, because nothing but the truth resides in them. I have one in particular in mind whom I have never caught thinking about himself. I would not dare make a pretense in the presence of that man even if I wanted to. His eyes contain the penetrating light of truth before which all disguises fall away.

Suppose we were all like that! It would hasten the millenium immensely. And if Americans were always to do what when the real temper of America is aroused they do, the world would always turn to America for guidance and America would be the most potent and influential force in all the world. So that when I look at pictures, whether they move or whether they do not move, I think of all the deep sources of happiness and of pain, of joy and of misery, that lie beneath that surface, and I am interested chiefly in the heart that beats underneath it all. For I know that there is the pulse and the machinery of all the great forces of the world.



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